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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 001033

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: POLO MODERATES SEACH FOR NEW CENTER-LEFT STRATEGY
FOR 2010

REF: BOGOTA 646

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

SUMMARY

1. The recent Polo Party Congress moved the Party further to the left, alienating more pragmatic members and weakening its general electoral appeal. Leading Polo moderates, including former Bogota Mayor Lucho Garzon and Senator Gustavo Petro, are frustrated with the Polo's sectarian internal politics and are reaching out to former Medellin Mayor Sergio Fajardo, former Bogota Mayor Antanas Mockus and Liberal party chief Cesar Gaviria in an effort to fashion a center-left alternative to the Polo. Still, Fajardo, the leading independent presidential candidate in recent polls, recognizes he needs Uribista votes to win and is not interested in joining an anti-Uribe front. End Summary.

POLO ISOLATING ITSELF ON FAR LEFT

2. (U) On February 26-28, the Polo Democratico Party held its national Congress ahead of the 2010 presidential elections. The radical left, led by party president and 2006 presidential candidate Carlos Gaviria and Senators Jorge Enrique Robledo and Jaime Dussan (with support from Bogota Mayor Samuel Moreno and his brother Senator Ivan Moreno), consolidated control over the party and moved it farther away from Colombia's political center. Gaviria was reelected to the Party presidency with 62% to 38% over Senator Luis Carlos Avellaneda, but looked shocked when some Polo delegates, in a reference to the effort to amend the constitution to allow a third term for President Alvaro Uribe, chanted "No Reelection!"

3. (C) Polo Secretary General Carlos Bula told us Polo would insist on running its own candidate at least through the first round of 2010 presidential elections--effectively ruling out any alliances with the Liberals or other groups until a possible second round of presidential voting. Polo will hold an open primary to decide its candidate. Robledo and Bula told us Gaviria is the most likely Polo candidate, but Gaviria told us that--in his seventies--he does not have the passion or energy to run. Still, Gaviria said the pressure on him to run from Communist and Maoist elements of the party controlled by Robledo would be "enormous." He said he hoped that Polo would instead reach outside the party to find a candidate acceptable to all of its different factions.

14. (C) Former Polo Secretary General Daniel Garcia-Pena, who supports Polo dissident Senator Gustavo Petro, told us the Congress had left the "Polo more divided than ever." Garcia said that with the most radical element in control, Polo was moving farther away from the mainstream "left" and losing the support base that elected Samuel Moreno Mayor of Bogota. Moreno's poor performance as mayor (reftel) is also not helping Polo's chances. Communist Party Representative Wilson Borja agreed the Congress was a missed opportunity, because it focused on "internal Polo politics" rather than developing a national strategy for the 2010 elections.

PRAGMATISTS LOOK TO CREATE NEW ALLIANCES

15. (C) Former Bogota Mayor Luis "Lucho" Garzon and Senator Gustavo Petro--leaders of the Polo center-left "pragmatist" wing--were further marginalized by radical elements during the recent Polo Congress. Garzon has been looking for alternatives to Polo, including the possible creation of a new center-left party and/or the formation of alliances with former Medellin Mayor and independent Sergio Fajardo, former Bogota Mayor Antanas Mockus, and Liberal Party leader Cesar Gaviria. Petro had also been exploring alternatives outside of Polo, inviting Fajardo, Mockus, Ingrid Betancourt, and U Party dissidents Marta Lucia Ramirez and Gina Parody to join him in building an alternative to President Uribe. Still, Polo Senator Jaime Dussan told us he is convinced both Petro and Lucho will rejoin Polo before August to challenge Carlos Gaviria for the Polo presidential nomination.

FAJARDO NOT INTERESTED

16. (C) Fajardo, the leading independent candidate in recent polls, remains unreceptive to the overtures from Petro and Garzon. Fajardo told us he will run a post-ideological, post-Uribe campaign which stresses his lack of ties to Colombia's traditional parties and political establishment. He will stress his support for some elements of Uribe's democratic security policy but will give greater emphasis to socio-economic issues. Fajardo advisor Federico Restrepo said Fajardo has had conversations with Garzon on a possible political alliance, but added that Fajardo recognizes that he will need to attract Uribe supporters to win. The last thing he wants to do is associate himself with Petro and Garzon in an anti-Uribe front. Medellin Mayor and Fajardo associate Alonso Salazar agreed that Fajardo would have little to gain--and much to lose--from an alliance with Petro, Garzon, and others.

BROWNFIELD